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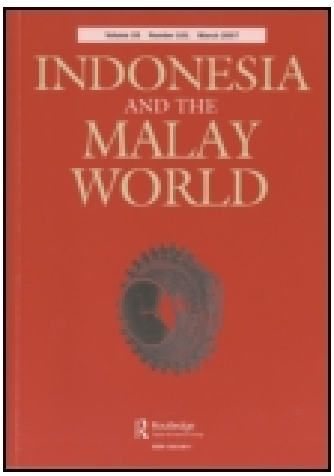

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REPRESENTING THE ANCIENT OTHER

BART BARENDREGT

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REPRESENTING THE ANCIENT OTHER

BART BARENDREGT

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> *Stones represented permanence. In this stone world people were born amongst the stones and, on death, returned to the stones. Ancestors were stone-faced* (Tilley and others, 2000: 221).

This article focuses on what I will call 'complex stone configurations': stone objects and the spatial arrangements they are part of. I will first introduce some of the stone objects to be discussed and give a short overview of the research done on them up to now. These stone objects, found primarily in the highlands of South Sumatra, but also in the provinces of Lampung, Bengkulu, Jambi, and in some parts of West Sumatra, are often huge, depicting humans, tigers, and elephants. They are seldom found in isolation, and in their vicinity can be found remains of bas-reliefs, decorated cists (a stone-lined burial chamber), and stone avenues (dolmen-lined paths). I will relate these objects to the contemporary cult of the ancestor Bitter Tongue. Widespread lore relates various stone objects to an ancestral past in which the founder of the widely distributed Semidang clan played a prominent role. Aside from these man-made stone objects, however, there is an even broader category of natural ones, often weirdly shaped or considered strange because of the contexts, e.g. the *seemingly* man-made state, in which they are found. Because this latter category is often less aesthetic in nature, these objects and their possible relation to man-made ones have been largely ignored in archaeological research. It is exactly these latter natural objects, however, that are still prominently used today in ancestral cults, specifically in pilgrimages (*ziarah*) and offerings. I will briefly dwell on the seeming contradiction of both natural and man-made categories, trying to show that these various objects, which probably stem from different times, are at least today conceived of as complementary and part of a coherent topological network of meanings.

Present-day communities consider the category of man-made objects to be primarily remains left by a former colonizing power. While most Indonesian communities eagerly try to claim a status as the original inhabitants of an area, the Highland Malay communities of southern Sumatra[1] in this way ascribe the archaeological remains to neighbouring communities, especially to their Rejang neighbours, whom they regard as the autochthonous people of the region, but whom they believe to have been expelled by their ancestors. As a result, in popular stories, jokes, and narratives many of the man-made stone objects are nowadays depicted as dangerous, inhabited by demonic agencies that belong to a former order. In contrast, many of the natural objects are seen as proof of the present (not as yet necessarily Islamic) order that replaced this previous one. In focusing on both categories of objects, the place-lore associated with them, and present-day spatial practices, I hope to shed further light on some of the ways these objects might produce meaning for today's Sumatran cultures.

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1. Southern Sumatra as the land of 'megalithic remains'

The ideas and concepts being discussed here, then, are those of some southern Sumatran communities (see Figure 1) commonly known as *orang ulu*. These are the inhabitants of Sumatra's Central Bukit Barisan and include, for example, the people of Besemah, Semende, Serawai, Kikim, Gumai, Ampat Lawang Lintang, Mulak, and Kisam and to a lesser extent those of the Enim, Lematang, and Ogan valleys. The naturalist Forbes (1885:190), who wandered through this part of Sumatra in the 1880s, rightfully remarked that 'the village customs in each of these great valley systems differ but slightly from each other; yet each has some distinctive characteristic; each has its own style of architecture; and each has its own pattern of garment and hat-ornamentation'. The region of southern Sumatra consists geographically of major rivers and their branches that are the basis for both a cultural unity and cultural differences. The name The Realm of Many Rivers (*Batang hari sembilan*) expresses both these correspondences and differences between valleys, even though historically the rivers that are counted among this set of nine have tended to vary over time.[2] Throughout this article, I will compare the solutions to common problems arrived at by neighbouring communities in order to shed light on otherwise often difficult to grasp institutions and practices.

Today the region of southern Sumatra is almost synonymous with its 'megalithic heritage' to outsiders, especially tourists. This reputation is particularly the result of a 1932 dissertation by van der Hoop, in which he discussed the many stone objects that can still be found on and near the Besemah plain. In spite of this popular attention, relatively little is known as yet about the objects, let alone about the patterns that may connect them.

Dutch civil servants first mentioned these stone objects in the second half of the nineteenth century, when large parts of the Southern Bukit Barisan ridge were subjugated in the course of colonial military campaigns. Ullmann (Anonymous, 1850:493) complains that in spite of his efforts he could find no one to tell him anything about these stone objects, and neither inscriptions nor manuscripts or other documents could be found. To these first Europeans it was clear, however, that the objects must be the remains of a former, long lost civilization, and thus they were labelled *Hindoe monumenten van Sumatra* (Figure 2). In the next decade Tombrink (1870) would devote a first complete study to 27 different objects he found in the Upper Lematang area. The Besemah plain and some of the neighbouring areas like Semendo, Darat, Kisam, and the Mulak were then still considered free borderlands (*sindang merdike*), where as a result no research could be done. For this reason, it has only been possible since the beginning of the twentieth century to study the objects there. Westenenk (1922) was the first to include a complete photographic record of them in his report, while in the 1930s, van der Hoop included a full inventory of them in his famous 'Megalithic remains–dissertation'. Next to the more popular scientific work by F.M. Schnitger (1935) and van Heekeren's *Bronze-iron age of Indonesia* (1958), van der Hoop's study remains the classic reference. Van der Hoop rejected the Hindu origins of some of the stone figures, and dates them to the beginnings of the current era. Ever since, however, there has been surprisingly little research into the objects that can further our understanding of them, their makers, and possible meanings attached to them. After Coèdes (1992) published his monograph on the maritime kingdom of Sriwijaya, archaeological research concentrated mainly on the area around the city of Palembang, which is today thought to have been the capital of this empire, at least for some time.

In the 1990s the temple complex of Bumi Ayu at Tanah Abang (between Palembang and Muara Enim) was rediscovered, while most attention in the region, and with it most

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Figure 1. Map of the main highland communities of southern Sumatra

funds, were earmarked for the Muara Jambi site. For the rest, southern Sumatra's cultural heritage was and still is largely entrusted to the local authorities, which have neither the money nor the expertise to carry out archaeological research. With hardly any archaeological fieldwork being done after the Second World War, and what fieldwork there was being focused mainly on possible remains of central court cultures, the stone figures under study here ranked rather low on the research agendas.[3]

Some conclusions can be drawn from these previous studies, however. The megalithic terminology used has come to be questioned, as it often seems to suggest a particular (Western European) cultural setting of collective monuments, transplanted to a South-East Asian context. Doubts were also expressed about often-oversimplified notions of cultural similarities based on form, migration, and patterns of diffusion. While the form of particular objects might correspond, the manner in which they embed and produce particular meanings is and always has been highly local in character (Tilley and Bennet, 2001:346). In the past few years, archaeological research has therefore focused on more local cultural patterns, without foregrounding possible external origins of techniques and meanings. Similarly the term megalith has in the end come to include almost every major stone object, rendering the term nearly useless (Glover, 1998: 23).

Recent archaeological research dropped the assumption of a universal megalithic

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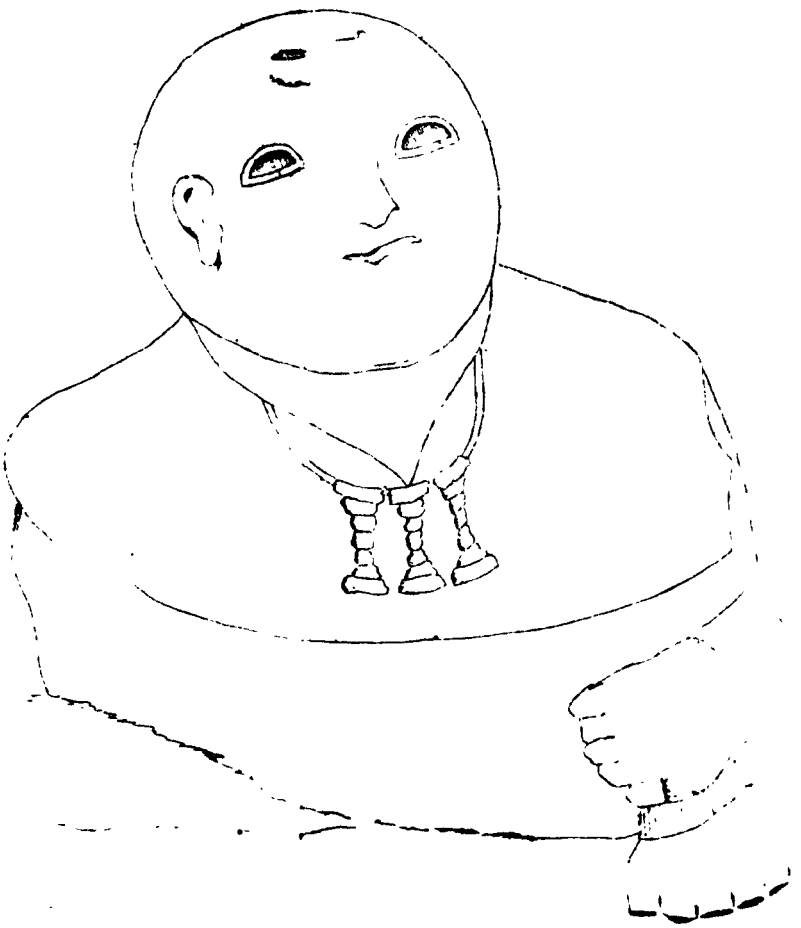

Figure 2. The somewhat odd drawings by Ullmann who, in line with ideas of the time, labelled human-like statues as 'Hindoo monuments' (source Anonymous, 1850)

culture, realizing that components of so-called megalithic cultures could be the products of very different stages and times. Standing stones, stone mortars, and stones with the shape of a *kris* hilt, as are found, for example, at the West Sumatran Mahat site, the Lampung Pugungraharjo complex, or those at Kedah in Malaysia, show correspondences with similar stone objects in the southern Sumatran highlands. According to Miksic (1987:2), however, ceramics found at the first three sites are not as old as was initially thought, dating to approximately the fourteenth century rather than to the prehistoric or classical period, as had long been assumed. A further complication is the fact that in the same site elements from different periods might be found, implying that some stone configurations were continued over long periods of time and possibly even by completely different communities.[4] On the Besemah plain, for example, one finds sites in which supposed prehistoric remains contain inscriptions that are highly similar to the *surat ulu* or *ke ge nge* script (Westenenk, 1922), a Pali-derived script, which might only have reached the interior in Srivijayan times.

What had been known since van der Hoop's study as the megalithic complex was initially thought to be limited to the west coast. Following the trail of most of the

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archaeological findings, van der Hoop believed he had discovered an age-old track that started in the Besemah plain, and continued through the plain of Semende, and from Lake Ranau deep into Lampung's Sekala Brak area and even into West Java. Van der Hoop's west coast theory has slowly lost in importance as various other sites were added, including ones in Jambi and the province of West Sumatra. For now the theory is that the complex stone configurations were not produced by present-day highland communities in southern Sumatra and the question of the relationship between van der Hoop's western trail and the Hindu-Buddhist remains on the east coast remains open. Modern scholars suggest that 'Pasemah probably formed a prehistoric centre of cultural development which supplied a necessary precondition enabling a sophisticated political and economical centre of Sriwijaya to develop at Palembang' (Miksic and others, 1996:45). In the future, then, the numerous stone configurations might even contribute to unravelling some of the early dynamics between highland and lowland communities and possibly help clarify the economic shift from Sumatra's west coast to the eastern one. Could, for example, east coast sites like Tanah Abang and Muara Jambi, both Hindu-Buddhist in character, have been made by those Javanese immigrants and cultural heroes like Adityawarman, Aria Damar, and their followers, who colonized large parts of central and southern Sumatra in the fourteenth century? This question is beyond the scope of this study and I will not go further concerning the possible makers of the stone objects or try to discover their aims in doing so. This also brings me to a more general methodological critique, which was also noted by Miksic (1987:39), namely the impossibility of projecting current ethnic constructions or notions on history. The fact that we now call something Besemah culture in archaeology does not imply that the people who erected these figures called themselves Besemah. Since I am interested in how these artefacts are interpreted and experienced today, I will restrict myself to their current use and interpretation and to the local knowledge that they are thought to embed, realizing that material objects, just because of their physical presence and durability may come to have meanings other than those initially attributed to them. I will particularly focus on how these objects are instrumental to the highland communities in dealing with a past that is often obscure and the ways in which they are believed to depict an ancestral reality that is never really gone.

Today, accounts similar to that of Adityawarman or Palembang's Aria Damar are distributed widely throughout the highlands of southern Sumatra, where Highland Malay communities often refer to such Javanese colonists, travelling upstream and founding many new settlements. Local lore has these colonizers, and especially their charismatic leaders, like Nage Barisan (Aji area), Raja Ulie (Semende area), Meraje Sari (Lematang area), or Atong Bungsu (Besemah area), arrive in the vacuum left by Srivijaya's decline. In these stories, moreover, the various stone configurations are often associated with these newcomers, and to the local population they therefore somehow reflect and objectify the historical patterns of migration into the interiors of Sumatra, as will become clear in this article. Forbes (1885:203) seems to suggest something in this direction, writing that hardly any tradition exists about the stone sculptures beyond their attribution to Bitter Tongue, or as he rather obscurely adds, 'that they represent the people who long, long ago inhabited this land, and who had tails that were cut off by the renowned ancestor of the Passumah people, Atum Bungsu'. I will return to this theme of migration and a supposed ancient other, but will first discuss the lore about Bitter Tongue and the supposed relation between this apical ancestor of the Semidang clan and the various stone objects.

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2. Bitter Tongue

In what follows I will focus on interpreting the stone objects and the configurations of which they are part, rather than on the original reasons for making them. In the colonial literature two remarks are often found, namely (1) that most figures are ascribed to the deeds of the legendary ancestor Serunting, Bitter Tongue, and (2) that the local population must be naïve since they consider what are plainly natural rocks to be products of culture.

One of the frustrations authors of early archaeological studies on this part of Sumatra voice concerns the supposed 'naïveté of the indigenous population' about the rocks' possible meaning, especially those they call human-like rocks (*batu jeme* or *batu orang*). Westenenk (1922), for example, refers to the discrepancy between his research findings and local ideas, stating that he 'was much surprised in no. 1 to find the statue of a magnificent figure, which ... [he] without a doubt would have called "the King", although the local population thought the statue to be a petrified girl' (Figure 3). Elsewhere we read that local stories explain these sculptures as being those of a race of giant humans, who were addressed by the ancestors on certain occasions, but who either out of fear or simple unwillingness, refused to answer. The ancestors became so angry about this rude behaviour that they said: 'remain stone' and those giants immediately turned into rock! (Anonymous, 1850:494). Tombrink (1870:16) shed a little further light on the matter, writing that 'the usual answer is that these rocks used to be people or animals that had been turned into stone, and that in ancient times there had been persons, who played an important role in these stories, who had the power (*lida pahit*) to change living things into stone at their command'.[5] The relation between the spoken word and physical materiality, and more specifically the power of the Bitter Tongue (*Lidah Pahit*) is made explicitly in the southern Sumatran region, which the former resident Westenenk (1932) therefore called the 'Land of Bitter Tongue'.[6] This power was especially ascribed to the apical ancestors of the Semidang clan, a people today dispersed throughout the provinces of Lampung, Bengkulu, and South Sumatra proper. Especially the ancestor Serunting was known for this magic. On the eve of the annexation of the highlands, van Rees (1870:36) noted about this ancestor that 'the first *puyang* was called Sembilan Galas. He was first succeeded by Puyang Serunting and then by Puyang Gemantur Sakti. During the last two ancestors' lives, mountain ridges arose that encircled the landscape, and the clans Semidang and Penjalang came into being. Puyang Serunting was a very powerful person who could turn someone into stone merely by thinking of it. He had a daughter who usually went down to the river to bathe and fetch drinking water. One day she stayed away much longer than usual, causing Serunting to become restless. Thoughts of murder, kidnap, and worse crossed his mind, and then the awful thought occurred to him, might she not have turned into stone? He got up and ran to the river where he found the girl's petrified body, lying lifeless near the water. His exaggerated worries had changed her into a stone sculpture'.

In another of these stories Serunting comes to Tinggi Hari where he meets a princess (*putri*). When he asks her where she is going, the proud lady ignores him, and enraged by this rudeness, Serunting turns her into stone. This story explains the somewhat odd name of *Batu Putri* that the local people gave to the stone Westenenk had found, which he thought represented a king.

To this day, Serunting, who is believed to have come from Lampung, is the protagonist of many narratives. A Malay manuscript (MS KITLV 371a) seems to confirm this by linking him and his eight brothers to the Lampung region and calling them *buai*: a clan based group that is prominent in that part of southern Sumatra. Some

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Figure 3. 'The King' sunk half-way into the ground, as Westenenk found it in 1920 (source: Westenenk, 1922)

have it that they are the nine men who settled along the upper reaches of the nine rivers of the realm of Palembang (*batang hari sembilan*) and who founded a new cultural order. In some way, then, many Highland communities consider Serunting to be the founder of their culture and his supposed grave in the village Pelang Kenidai is still an important pilgrimage (*ziarah*) site. Here one also finds a flat stone on which he is said to have prayed. At first sight it is an ordinary stone, and certainly not man-made. It is, however, one of many natural stones that has gained a new meaning and is today taken to be a physical mark of an ancestral order. I will return to the more specific meanings attached to man-made objects, especially to these so-called Bitter Tongue stones, and their relation to this ancestor's alleged petrified victims, but first I want to turn to the category of natural stones.

3. Natural versus man-made stones

After surveying the various stones found in the Lematang Ulu area, Tombrink (1870) completed his journey on 5 August 1864 by climbing the Serelo hill near Lahat. Local people had told him that a very special sculpture stood on this hill's difficult to reach summit, namely one of a woman copulating with a dog. Finding only a natural rock, Tombrink was clearly disappointed, though this was not the first time. During one of his journeys to Batu Raja he visited a group of well-known sculptures he had often heard about. According a local legend, a prince hunting with his dog came upon the banks of the Ogan River. Some say that he met Serunting there while others tell how he spied a beautiful nymph, bathing. She became so angry with this person staring at her that she immediately cursed him. The prince, his dog, and his horse turned into stone and ever after the place was called 'Stone of the King' (Batu Raja). When Tombrink arrived at the site, guided by a local chief, he was very disappointed to find that the alleged statues

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were merely a natural block of sandstone that resembled a human figure. In both cases Tombrink (1870:35) refers to some of the indigenes' childish and easily aroused imagination and calls the rocks mere products of nature, nor worthy of further interest.

Although archaeologically they may have little or no interest, it is striking that natural rocks are especially endowed with explicit meanings. Such rocks were central in rituals that were regularly held until recently (Jaspan, 1976: 165) and even now they continue to be the goal of pilgrimages and are often part of present-day cults and lore. An example is the *batu puyang beristirahat*, the stone upon which the ancestor Lebi rested. This ancestor was an Islamic saint of the village of Pulau Panggung (Semendo Darat) and the rock is said to bear his imprint. Then there is the meditation stone (*batu betarak* or *batu berambanan*) of Penyandingan (Semendo Darat), which looks like a model of a strangely shaped mountain, or the immense Giant Stone (*batu besak*) in Besemah's Jarai district, the guardian of which is said to be a huge demon with sharp teeth. None of these objects is very different from other natural rocks, apart from their strange shapes or the strange contexts in which they are found, and, of course, the meanings attributed to them. The attention paid to these stones and the ancestral presence embodied in them, moreover, contrasts sharply with people's attitude toward the man-made stone objects mentioned earlier, which are most anxiously avoided. Tombrink (1862:327, 1870:16) already mentions that the local population does not seem to care for antiquities and Hindu remains and that save for a few exceptions these were no longer venerated.

Is it possible that the association of the man-made objects with past 'paganism and superstitions' might explain their neglect and the many instances of iconoclasm (see Figure 4)? Not coincidentally, it is often the faces and heads of such sculptures that are damaged as according to Hindu belief, a statue is rendered powerless if its face is damaged.[7] Tombrink (1870:42) indeed cites an account of a certain Soero Dilogo, an upstream representative (*jenang*) of the sultanate of Palembang, who early in the nineteenth century together with his fanatical followers demolished the above-mentioned statue of Batu Raja, accusing the people who worshipped statues of heresy.[8] Systematic Islamic iconoclasm is unlikely to have occurred in this region, however, as in Tombrink's day orthodox Islam had not yet penetrated the southern Sumatran highlands and ancestral shrines (*rumah dewa* or *rumah puyang*) were still the central religious structures everywhere. It was only in the 1920s, a time generally known as the *musim Sarekat*, that the last of these shrines was demolished and a more orthodox Islam was introduced in most of the highland communities.

The apparent neglect of the man-made stone objects does not imply that they are not incorporated in local cosmogonies. Most of the objects in this category have vivid lore associated with them, and many settlements, like Batu Ruse (Stone Deer), Lesung Batu (Stone Mortar), or Batu Surau (Petrified Prayer House) owe their name to one of the rocks in the hamlet's vicinity. Time and again, however, the negative associations of these rocks are remarkable. The name Tinggi Hari (Late in the Morning), given to a complex of them in Pulau Pinang, is significant, because it refers to a location better avoided in the early morning. This is a place known for its supernatural dangers (*anker* or *gising*), which is conceptually 'hot', and populated by weretigers and (not necessarily evil) spirits. The highlanders therefore associate the man-made objects with negative events and objectionable acts. The tigers depicted (*batu setue*; weretiger stone) at Pagar Gunung village are, for example, believed to clutch an adulterous woman and her illegitimate child (Figure 5), while other statues are said to be women copulating with

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Figure 4. An example of a demolished statue near Benue Keling village, Besemah. For the occasion of the photo the head had to be dug up from the mud nearby (photo B. Barendregt)

dogs, or people who had been extremely arrogant.[9] The man-made stones are thereby morally defined as bad.

People thus seem to avoid the man-made and venerate the natural objects. Although the highlanders today are somehow conscious of the difference between the natural and man-made objects, it is striking that this distinction is conceptualized in different terms. In line with their ideas as set out above, both categories of objects are in fact not so much believed to be man-made, but rather are thought to be the remains of people and things associated with them, be they the petrified victims of Serunting, or the magical tokens of other ancestral deeds. Instead of 'foregrounding' the distinction nature-culture

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Figure 5. The *batu setue* at Pagar Gunung village (photo B. Barendregt)

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which is the artificial one here, only made by outsiders,[10] they might be seen as realities turned into stone: plain natural stones or humans that have been subjected to certain magical processes. To the highlander, furthermore, both categories, natural and man-made, are clearly elements within the same topological set of meanings.

The interrelationship of natural and man-made stone objects in southern Sumatra has never been structurally investigated, partly because the little research that has been done has mainly focused on sculptures as products of a bygone civilization, whose aims and aesthetics had to be reconstructed. Objects have thus been studied as singularities or parts of a particular site, without serious consideration of present-day interpretations and related lore because, it was argued, there are just too many discrepancies between the material object and the supposed meaning. I will offer a preliminary overview of the often intriguing ways in which many stone objects in southern Sumatra are interpreted today as being related to each other. As I will show, in the process the different categories of objects are regarded as proof of a new cultural order brought about by the ancestors, or as the remains of a preceding hostile power that was expelled long ago.

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4. Interpretive cultures: marking centres, borders, and new values

Present-day highland communities of southern Sumatra incorporate both natural and man-made stone objects in a to-them-recognizable ancestral past, which through these objects is physically embedded within the present. It seems to be irrelevant that the true age of these objects and the original reason for them might be hundreds or thousands of years older than this ancestral order. The local population hardly worries about inconsistent chronologies, making it possible for a group of prehistoric dolmen to be interpreted as the 'Gong of the Universe' (*gong jagat*), a petrified instrument whose deep and resonating sound formerly signalled the ancestors to gather.[11] To the local population, recently manufactured *kris*-hilt shaped stones and ones from burial mounds at the other side of the valley are elements in the same network of meaning: all these objects are said to be remains of an ancestral past (*tapak puyang*), a past that is never bygone (*silam*) and can still be invoked. I deal in greater depth with the terms *tapak* and *silam* elsewhere (Barendregt, forthcoming). Here I restrict myself to some brief definitions and then move on to how these terminologies relate to the various stone objects.

Tapak literally means imprint or mark and can be seen as more or less equivalent to the Malay *kramat*, although in contrast to *kramat*, *tapak* is not applicable to persons, but only to objects or localities. *Silam* (locally also *kelam*) refers to the reality of an other-worldly domain, and is used for generalized persons or communities that are supposedly located in the world of the beyond. These are not spirits, however, as the greatest of ancestors are believed never to have died, but to simply have moved into another domain from which they will some day return when they are needed. In this world of the beyond they are thought to live in their own houses and settlements, generally known as lost villages (*dusun silam*), of which the ones on Mount Dempo (Besemah Libar, see Figure 6) and on the Kaba and Sebakas Hills (both Bengkulu) are the most prominent examples in southern Sumatra.

Such pre-Islamic and pre-Hindu-Buddhist beliefs seem to have been widespread throughout Indonesia at one time. Similar ideas existed until recently among the Sundanese, who had thought the greatest of their ancestors *ngahiang*, disappeared. Van Tricht (1929[a]:7), for example, writes of Kanekes and Karang communities where 'Everyone of the old generation erected a stone for himself before dying and then *ngahiang*, "became spirit or God", which, according to legend, was the usual way that

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Figure 6. The summit of Mount Dempo (actually the Merapi Peak), from which one can view the 'lost village' of Talang Pisang, the abode of the Besemah ancestors and the Lord of Souls. On this summit various *tapak* shrines are located, devoted to tutelary spirits (photo B. Barendregt)

the Great Ones parted from this world in the past, without leaving mortal remains'. Pennings (1902:376), describing the West Javanese Karang community of Kosala, mentions, furthermore, that whenever the forebear felt that his or her time to *ngahiang* had come, he or she would first erect a huge stone (*tanda hiang*) so that the descendants might know where to go to memorialize them (*muja*, from *puja*, to venerate). Then they disappeared together with their houses. The many open places of prayer in West Java, consisting of terraces with stone sculptures, are believed to have been former ancestral settlements.[12] Hasskarl (1842:130) gives the example of Sumedang Larang that is alleged to have once been located in the Lebak area. In Hasskarl's day the place was desolate and local people were afraid to go here, telling how they frequently heard the sound of gongs and gamelan and the singing of *ronggeng* (dancing-girls). They could never find the source of these sounds, however.

According to local belief in southern Sumatra, most of the great ancestors similarly left their marks. Before they went away they told their children and grandchildren that when needed, they could be visited at a specific spot, marked by a particular sign, often a stone object, where they could hence be memorialized. In the absence of a body, the ancestor's hat or trousers were buried at that spot. These locations, generally known as *tapak* (marks), *tanda* (signs), or *tambak* (elevations), are today still considered sacred. Many southern Sumatran people regularly make a pilgrimage to them, to ask for favours or to learn the martial art *kuntau*, or any other form of magic from the supernatural beings alleged to be in residence.

Returning to the supposed naivety of the inhabitants of the Lematang Ulu area, as suggested by Tombrink, we should ask whether they did not want to know who produced these objects, or whether their interpretation was simply a way of dealing with an otherwise largely obscure and unwritten past, a past of which the stones are seen as a durable proof that, man-made or not, was incorporated into the cultural landscape.[13] But what then is the nature of the relation between these numerous, often damaged stones, both natural and man-made? I will summarize some of the patterns that I have found as part of today's interpretations. I will make a four-fold distinction with regard to the function and meaning of these objects, realizing that this classification is preliminary and far from complete. These categories are (1) objects that mark ritual centres, (2) objects that mark particular borders, and (3) natural stones that are taken as a proof of a pacified wilderness, and of which especially the so-called *batu ampar* will be described here. The fourth category is that of the so-called Ancient Other, which will be dealt with later.

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Ritual centres

The stones in this category, locally known as *batu sidang* or *batu asahan* (meeting stones), but also called *batu penyumpah* (oath-taking stones), are the most prominent ancestral remains, regarded as the primary reminders of an ancestral founder. Next to the supposed grave(s) of Bitter Tongue, the best-known southern Sumatran example is probably the burial mound of Atong Bungsu. Forbes (1885:199) writes that the place that the Besemah communities

> hold in most reverence is the grave of the *Nené Poyang*, or stem father of the Passumah, over which their most binding oaths are taken; [and] to perjure themselves on it would be equal to sealing their doom. If there be a dispute between two people of the same or of different villages, both retire, accompanied by their respective chiefs, to this

> sacred spot, where a fowl, or a sheep or a buffalo, according to the gravity of the affair, is killed, which after being cut up into small pieces is cooked in a great pot. Then he who is to take the oath holding his hand, or a long kriss of the finest sort, over the gravestone, and over the cooked animal says: 'If such and such be not the case, may I be afflicted with the worst evil'. The whole of the company then partake of the food. If the man has sworn falsely they believe that in a short time after he will be seized with some dire sickness, and will die; if he plants his fields they will not grow, or will produce barren stems; but not only will he himself be crushed by misfortune, but, in an affair of magnitude, all who were of his village who ate of the feast, if not the village also, will be overtaken by disaster.

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Most of such oath-taking stones were placed in the middle of the settlement, where a number of them still can be found today. According to local beliefs at the founding of a settlement, its centre was determined by a ritual specialist, most often the founder himself. The soil at this point was supposedly the heaviest and thus the wealthiest. A stone was erected to mark this ritual centre and thus, even after the greatest of ancestors had passed away, continued to embody ancestral presence in the village. These stones are thought to be the places where the ancestors used to gather (*batu sindang*) on the eve of war, in times of crisis, or during smallpox epidemics.[14] They were also places where oaths were taken (*batu penyumpah*), where disputes over land or stolen cattle were resolved, and where persons thought to be guilty of incest or adultery took an oath of innocence in front of the clan and its ancestors.[15] The stones were thought to have anthropomorphic qualities. Tombrink (1870:19), discussing a stone pillar at the village of Karang Dalem Ulu in the former shire of Gumai Lembak, writes that the inhabitants of Karang Dalam make sacrifices and take oaths there in front of their ancestors. During my own fieldwork (1998) the stone and ancestral shrine behind it were still intact, and the villagers told me how the stone had recently been coming up from the ground, attaining a face (Figure 7). The oath-taking stone seems to be an old, widely distributed phenomenon, mentioned as early as 1715 in the diaries of the VOC merchant Hofman in his description of the former institutions of the realm of the Minangkabau. Hofman relates how the legendary leader Pepatih Sabatan had abolished the ancient law of *salam ayer* and substituted for it an 'oath of purification that is performed by placing a hand on a stone and calling to God, saying that if [I am] indeed guilty, may [I] be crushed by rocks' (cited in Stapel, 1935:31).

Until the 1920s an ancestral shrine (*rumah dewa* or *rumah puyang*), where the clan or village heirlooms were kept, usually stood next to these central stone objects. During the *musim sarekat* (*c.*1914–25), when the Sarekat Islam party propagated a more orthodox Islam, new religious and socio-organizational concepts were introduced, undermining former clan affiliations. As a consequence, the ancestral shrines were demolished, leaving the stones in front of them as an apparent anomaly.

Boundaries of the hamlet: Batu Betangkop

Another, more eccentric pattern is that of the so-called jaws of stone (*batu betangkop*), often huge stones, perfectly split down the middle. I found many of these during my research, especially in the Semende Darat district, where almost every settlement had

Figure 7. Oath-taking stone in front of the ancestor shrine, Karang Dalem village (Gumai Lembak) (photo B. Barendregt)

one near its supposed boundary. These were described as two enormous jaws that used to take many victims (Figure 8).

Like the oath-taking stones these objects, clearly natural and often located near a river, are endowed with anthropomorphic qualities. They are said to be either demons (*iblis*) that once guarded the shrines of a former colonizing power, or these shrines themselves. Although the lore associated with these stones tells how the founding ancestors had demolished these jaws by simply putting a piece of bamboo between them, many people said that until the late 1960s the stones were still regularly heard, producing an awful and frightening sound. Even today children are warned not to go into the wilderness, as they

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Figure 8. A *batu betangkop* near Batu Surau village in the Semende Darat area (photo B. Barendregt)

might be caught and eaten by these stone jaws. These objects, then, seem to mark a zone of transition between the hamlet and the forest, which is otherwise invisible: a conceptual boundary. These frightening stones might even be the physical remnants of a former practice of human sacrifice. Some accounts, at least, suggest such practices, especially for Lampung (cf. Fünke, 1958:59–78),[16] whereby during rituals slaves were decapitated and sacrificed. Van der Hoop (1932:59) mentions another example, the so-called 'Stone of Saturation' (*batu kenjangan*), near Batu Berak, north of Liwa near the shores of Lake Ranau. In one of the coffee gardens there he found a man-made monolith and some dolmen about which the owner of the garden told him that until four

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generations before, the villagers would yearly sacrifice the most beautiful girl in the hamlet. She was placed with her back against the monolith, a loose piece of stone representing her bridal crown, and then her throat was slit. Near Kenali (Lampung) was a similar sacrificial place that consisted of dolmen where girls suffering from a growth or tumor were sacrificed. By way of punishment van der Hoop adds, many Kenali women presently still suffer from this affliction. Like the jaws of stone, these dolmen were said to make a growling noise (van der Hoop, 1932:59). It might be that the realities of these former practices are thus embodied in these stone objects and in this way have come to represent a pagan and often demonic past that is now echoed in terms like Shrines of Devils (*candi iblis*).[17]

New values: batu ampar

Where the first category of stone objects marks ritual centres and is therefore inherently associated with the establishment of culture and settlements, the second seems somehow to relate to forces that were expelled at the founding, hence marking the boundaries of the founded place. In the present context, in which Islam has a dominant voice, these entities have come to be characterized as demonic and dangerous.

Both categories therefore relate to an established cultural order, or an orderly world, which Collins (unpublished: 306) describes as *jagat* or universe and is characterized by the introduction of new rules and ancestral customs.[18] This new order is often juxtaposed with a preceding stage, in which people were said to have lacked these religious values, organization, and corresponding rules, and thus behaved like mere animals.[19] In many cases in southern Sumatra this primeval covenant is, moreover, linked to the introduction of Islam,[20] which again is memorialized in stone objects.

Natural phenomena are thus taken as proof of a pacified wilderness, and thus embody a new and durable ancestral reality. Good examples of such an object of pacification are the so-called 'extensive stones' (*batu ampar*). Westenenk (1913:241) mentions several of them that he found in the Padang highlands, including the *aua Duatu*, a rock plate or *batu hampar* underneath which the legendary buffalo Binuang once lived. He also mentions the *batu paislaman* (Islamizing stone) 'on which Sjech Ibrahim sat, and from which he tried to convert all people that came to bathe at the seven estuaries,[21] by making them utter the Islamic confession of faith'.

Similar stories are found in the southern Sumatran highlands, of which one of the best examples is probably the *batu ampar* near Muara Tenang (Semendo Darat) at the upper reaches of the Enim River. This rock is also known as a 'shrine' (*candi*) or 'island' (*pulau*) and is known throughout the region as a pilgrimage destination. Prins (1935) mentions this stone as one of the four ancient *ngawak* (sacred places).[22] The local people believe that the large stone found here in front of a cave, was once the place of prayer of Mas Pangeran Bonang, one of the nine Islamic saints (*wali songo*) who propagated Islam in the archipelago. Bonang is said to have introduced Islam to the Semende Darat some time in the sixteenth or seventeenth century. The rock plate, which is only approximately two metres square in size, is said to be able to accommodate one, but also hundreds of people. Those who come here to pray or meditate often report having met the holy man himself, finding him standing at their side when they opened their eyes.

Besides introducing Islam, Sunan Bonang is credited with pacifying the wilderness on this mountain plateau, a story known as the Agreement Below the Tree Tepung Padang (*riwayat perjanjian di bawah Tepung Padang*). It tells how one day when Sunan Bonang travelled through this jungle on his way to Bengkulu, he suddenly walked into a meeting

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of a thousand tigers, lions, and other cat-like animals: the inhabitants of this place that were actually weretigers. Bonang realized that if he were to escape he should climb a high tree, and having done so without being noticed he overheard the conversation of what presumably was the leader of the weretigers. Sunan Bonang overheard the magic charm uttered by the weretiger king and memorized it to use it against them because, if a person pronounced it before the weretiger roared, he would be free to go. The weretiger king instructed his followers that if they met with a man they should roar at once and the person would immediately be petrified with fear. From then on the Tiger King and his followers were banned to the kingdom of seven gorges (*Tumutan tujuh*), the realm of weretigers, and the Semende still use Bonang's charm when entering the forest at the upper reaches of the Enim.

In different ways all the categories of stones mentioned here are nowadays interpreted as the physical markers of a newly founded cultural order, memorializing the introduction of new religious and socio-organizational values and symbolizing the pacification of the wild elements that preceded this new order. But what does this say about the human-like sculptures that are so often associated with the deeds of Bitter Tongue and his like, and how can these objects be understood as part of a wider topological network of meaning that overwhelmingly points to a new cultural order?

5. Topological networks: migrant king and the expelled outsider

In an earlier paragraph I referred to Serunting, the arch-founder of the Semidang clan, and the overt association of him being made with the man-made stones. Present-day lore explains how Serunting gained the ability to be Bitter Tongue, either from Ratu Senuhun, the legendary ruler of Majapahit, who had written something on his tongue, or from a wise man at the Seguntang Hill, who once spat in his mouth. Serunting had come to ask for this magical gift, after he had lost a fight with his arch-enemy and brother-in-law, Rie Tabing, who was actually his most important bride-giver (*lebu meraje*). According to these oral traditions, Rie Tabing had been the original inhabitant of the wilderness around Mount Dempo and reputedly could not be beaten. From his wife, however, Rie Tabing's sister, Serunting learned that Rie Tabing's spirit was located in an *ilalang* fern. Knowing this secret, Serunting managed to wound Rie Tabing, who then retreated to the kingdom of seven gorges (*Tumutan tujuh*), the same kingdom that is believed to shelter the tigers banned by Sunan Bonang. Rie Tabing is believed to have eventually become the Lord of the Wilderness here.

In Malay narrative, the expulsion or pacification of an autochthonous population is generally related to the Austronesian notion of multiple origins: that of an original population in juxtaposition to superior migrants who arrive at a later stage. This notion sets out an order of precedence, linking the two populations to respectively nature and culture. The autochthonous community would henceforth regulate access to the land, thereby functioning as Lord of the Land (*tuan tanah*), while the migrants would provide a ruling line.[23] Schefold (2002:422) depicts this complementary role as a 'contractual relation of the social order', although, as he argues, the wilderness is not seen equally positively in all societies.

The motif of a new cultural order brought in from outside is one of the most prominent themes in the Bitter Tongue stories and other southern Sumatran narratives. Here, similarly, a phase of uncultivated wilderness, where people had been without rules and institutions, thus gives way to a new order, during which the wild elements are either pacified and transformed into benevolent forces (see the *batu betangkop* and the *batu*

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ampar) or expelled. Both possibilities are found in the southern Sumatran material, while the stone objects found throughout this region are clearly seen to be the physical markers of this new reality.

The remains of the eleventh-century Saivite complex of Bumi Ayu, located at Tanah Abang also gain a new meaning. Knaap (1904:xlviii) accidentally found the remains of this temple, when during his visit there the bank of the river collapsed, exposing stones of red mudstone. These stones were locally believed to be remains of the old realm of Kedebong Oendan, which once stretched from Modong to Babat near Batu Raja, and according to local lore had its capital in Tanah Abang. The local people told Knaap how 'only the ruins of the houses were left' and a story by the elders that tells how one day, when Bitter Tongue asked to be taken across the river, everyone was busy with a wedding ceremony and no one wanted to help him. So Bitter Tongue said, disappear you country, and everyone disappeared.

Similar tales of conflict and destruction exist in other highland communities, often in connection with founding stories. The Besemah tell how their apical ancestor, Atong Bungsu, introduced such superior new techniques as wet rice cultivation and astrology (*ilmu pughu pughu*) and laid down new rules and prescriptions, thus founding a moral community of 'our people' (*jeme kite*) and a new order called *jagat Besemah*. Atong is said to have come from Majapahit, but after his arrival in the new land he soon finds out that there are other inhabitants who are led by a woman named Queen Silver Hair (*Ratu Rambut Selake*). A heated debate evolves over the question of who can claim prior rights to this land. Popular lore tells how Atong had put some earth of Majapahit in his walking stick, and hitting it on the ground had shouted that this ground was his: 'If I lie, and this is not truly my soil, may I and all my descendants forever be cursed and wiped out'. Rambut Selake was impressed by this solemn oath and not realizing she had been deceived, she and her people immediately retreated to what is now known as the Lebong area, while the people of Rambut Selake are assumed to be the Rejang neighbours. The many stone graves in the near vicinity of Mingkik and Benue Keling, the alleged first settlements in Besemah, are still called Rejang graveyards today. This theme of a noble Javanese immigrant with a group of followers who displace an original Rejang population is common throughout the highlands, and on further consideration the choice of many of Seruting's victims also does not somehow seem coincidental.[24]

In most tales, the Highland Malay classify both the Rejang and some of the Lematang and Ogan communities as the *jeme (Lubai) Rambang* (Rambang people). The descendants of Kedongan Ali, who live in Tanah Abang and whose numbers seem to be restricted, might be another remnant of these once widely distributed Rambang communities.[25] According to some of the highlanders, long ago these Rambang were on hostile terms with the highlanders' ancestors, and the Bitter Tongue stories thus clearly seem to depict a time of newcomers at war with an autochthonous population.

In parallel with these local histories, many of the man-made stone objects are called petrified Rejang (*batu Rejang*), Rejang shrine (*candi Rejang*), or Rejang settlements (*dusun Rejang*) (Figure 9a-c). Some of the objects, moreover, are called *kalangan empat* or broken stones (*batu patah*), and they are believed to be the building materials, mainly posts, with which the ancients built their houses (*ramuan rumah jeme bari*). Was Forbes (1885:203) then referring to the Rejang when he talked about 'the people who lived in this land long, long ago' and had tails that Atum Bungsu, the renowned ancestor of the Passumah people, cut off? If so, this could go some way to explaining the neglect of the man-made stones, since in contrast to other hostile elements, these represent an ancient 'other' that could not be pacified and had to be expelled.

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Figure 9 a-c. The alleged remnants of a former hostile power, (a) the *kalangan empat* of Semende Tanjung Laut area, often called 'Rejang village', (b) the 'Rejang grove' in Besemah's sub-district Jarai, and (c) the petrified Rejang of Geramat (Mulak area) (photos B. Barendregt)

6. The ancient other: popular lore, ridicule, and spatial taboos

Narratives

As I argued above, it seems highly unlikely that contemporary highland communities should be held responsible for the production of most of the man-made stones that can be found in and near their settlements. The realities that these objects, are said to encapsulate, and the experiences they thus somehow evoke are, however, deeply embedded within the narratives now found in these communities. These ancestral narratives might vary in emphasis regarding specific characters, objects, or places, or in the widely divergent claims they try to support, but they all refer to a common mythological world (cf. Voorhoeve, 1978:93). Irrespective of their variety, the protagonist of these stories is usually a cultural hero, a young newcomer, who strikingly enough, might not necessarily always represent all things good and proper to a modern audience. These heroes prove their capabilities in befriending some, but especially in contesting with others. For this reason, south Sumatran narratives are replete with conflict and bloodshed and repeatedly refer to an autochthonous population, expelled long ago. It is especially the Rejang and Rambang communities—neighbouring peoples and therefore the immediate others for most South Sumatran highland societies—that are commonly the victims in these narratives, and as a result they are now linked to most of the man-made stones.

Although a survey in the Rejang areas did not provide further proof of the truth of these stories of expulsion and the Rejang origin stories hardly give any clues in this direction either,[26] the dominant neighbour in the west is sometimes said to have inhabited the highland plateaux up to the point of present-day Lahat (Marsden, 1966:43). Marsden even comes to the conclusion that the Rejang should somehow be considered the 'original Sumatran' population and thus be held up as a standard and prototype for the whole interior of Sumatra. Jaspan (1976:184) says of them, moreover, that 'although the founding ancestors of their four pillar clans are believed to be descendants of the Javanese royal house of Madjpahit, the Redjang regard themselves, in contrast to their Malay, Lembak, Pekal, Bengkulu, and Minangkabau neighbours, as the original and autochthonous inhabitants of South Sumatra'. The Rejang area may therefore once have been much more extensive, comprising the greater part of southern Sumatra. Many of my Besemah informants could name villages still inhabited by supposed descendants of the Rejang, whom they called the original population. Over time, informants said, these people, whom I unfortunately did not have the opportunity to interview, had adapted to Besemah culture to such a degree that they could hardly be distinguished from the other villagers any more.

Still, apart from sagas and sung poetry, no historical accounts were found that could shed light on such inter-community conflicts, the existence of armies, or the occurrence of systematic warfare within this region.[27] Many older people, however, still remembered talk of inter-village wars, which they said lasted for generations and in which their grandfathers had been involved. These feuds were mostly about unsettled debts and generally the result of the highland traditions of blood money (*tepong bumi*) and oaths of retaliation (*bangon*). Many stories are thus about small-scale conflicts between the Besemah and the neighbouring communities of Kikim, Ogan, Manna, Lintang, and especially the Rejang. These inter-village wars are the stuff of many narratives.

Ridicule and jokes

To this day the highlanders' Rejang neighbours to the west, and to a lesser extent the

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Rambang in the north-east, are depicted as having been in the past cruel and powerful competitors who tried to take control over the whole of southern Sumatra's economy. They tell how these autochthonous people were eventually tricked and banished by technically superior Javanese migrants, although they continued to be associated with the ancient wilderness around Mount Dempo (*Rimbe legun dalam Dempo*). This association with the forces of wilderness is clearly shown by the many popular stories in which the Rambang are thus turned into monkeys. The Besemah and other highland communities furthermore ridicule their Rejang neighbours, and often jokingly call them 'people with tails' (*jeme Rejang beeko*).[28] Jaspan (1976:186) similarly mentions how the lowland Malay and the people of Bengkulu stigmatically use this name of the tailed Rejang, 'insinuating a proximity with vestigial subhuman or anthropoid physical traits'.

Almost every present-day highland Malay community therefore has its own history in which a founding ancestor and his followers come from elsewhere and eventually chase away the autochthonous Rejang population to beyond the headwaters of the river Musi. Many of these tales make fun of how these ancestors cut off the Rejang's tails. In coastal Serawai, for example, people still tell that Rejang houses used to have holes in their floors, so the residents could let their tails hang down, and they describe how their ancestors, standing below the houses, had cut these tails off. The tail seems particularly to be associated with forest-dwelling groups, as the Serawai add that today only one category of Rejang people have this mark, namely the Rejang of the interior (*Rejang pedalaman*), who are said to still live a semi-nomadic life in the forest.[29] Jaspan (1976:110) even mentions how the Rejang themselves use a similar discriminative terminology for both the neighbouring Bang Aji group and indeed one of their own subgroups, possibly the Rejang of the interior. These latter they call *Rejang Sawah* or *orang sawah berikor* and regard them as backward because they continue to be hunter-gatherers. The juxtaposition of insiders and outsiders thus becomes one of the wild versus cultivated, and in some instances even opposes wet rice cultivators to hunter-gatherers.

The defeat and subsequent departure of the autochthonous population of the Besemah highland plain and adjacent areas is further memorialized in proverbs and sayings. The Highland Malay, for instance, point at the characteristic Rejang bamboo basket (*berunang*) that differs from other peoples' baskets in not having a wooden frame (*bake dikde berbingkai*) and for that reason is said to be unfinished. Its incompleteness is blamed on the fact that the Rejang were evicted before they could finish it. The same reason is given for why the Rejang wear their bush knives without a sheath (*pisau dikde bebelangke*).

Spatial taboos

As the various stone objects mentioned in this article make clear, this antagonistic past is furthermore projected on particular places and objects. This is borne out by data from the Jarai sub-district where near the former hamlet of Blambangan a bamboo grove stands that is widely known as the Rejang Grove (*buloh Rejang*, Figure 9b). It derives its name from the former inhabitants of that area and the graves located in the grove are said to be those of Rejang ancestors. It is said, moreover, that a Rejang ruler, Raja Rejang Lebong Kemanung, was buried in the vicinity of nearby Air Lage.[30] The Highland Malay communities have a variety of proofs of the former 'Rejang occupation', and regularly refer to graves, former house posts, and abandoned fish ponds, all

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believed to be the locations of Rejang villages. They are reluctant to visit these places as the Rejang ancestral graves there are widely known to be dangerous (*angker*).

Although these hostilities are usually said to belong to the past, the Highland Malay are still not too sure if their former enemies' ancestors think the same way. The ancestors of the Rejang, in the form of supernatural beings (*jeme alos*), are still thought to be dangerous to a Besemah visiting the Lebong area. Thus, when a Besemah travels in the direction of Bengkulu he hides his identity. Similarly, a Besemah would think twice before planning a garden in the direction of the sunset (*mate agri mati*), which is the direction of Rejang Lebong. The Besemah believe that due to the curse of a Rejang ancestor, prosperity and wealth will not come to a Besemah who clears land there. The Semidang, who are descendants of Serunting, are especially afraid to enter the Rejang area, believing the Rejang ancestors to be vengeful because Serunting changed them into monkeys or stone.[31] The Rejang and Rambang people in turn are advised not to climb Mount Dempo where the ultimate Highland ancestors, such as the Lord of the Souls (Raje Nyawe) and others are said to live in the invisible village of Talang Pisang. The same Mount Dempo, to the highlander the most sacred of all pilgrimage places, houses other objects, which memorialize both the coming of a new order and the banishment of an ancient other. In local lore, the White Ship Stone (*batu lancang potih*), a flat stone at the summit of Mount Dempo and one of the frequently visited pilgrimage places, is thus believed to be the place from which the warlords of Majapahit commanded their troops going into battle.

7. Conclusion: southern Sumatra as a land of migration?

Within the social sciences the distinction between nature and culture is increasingly questioned. In this article I have shown how in the context of the southern Sumatran highlands the distinction between clearly man-made objects and natural ones can be conceptualized in different terms. Although the highland communities distinguish between these categories of objects, the ways that they conceptualize these differences are highly vernacular in character, and different from what a Western observer might conclude. Objects from both categories are actually seen as elements within a single topological network of meanings.

The category of natural objects is predominantly associated with an ancestral past, and more precisely with the coming into being of a new cultural order and its values. In popular lore some of these objects are often depicted as a last convulsion of wild and hostile elements, which once subjected were transformed into benevolent forces. The other category, that of man-made stones, be these stone avenues, old burial mounds, or the well-known human-like sculptures, is primarily associated with a preceding situation.

But why is it then that especially this category is associated with the idea of an ancient other? Why are these proofs of a former civilization not associated with one's own forebears? At this point I can only speculate about the exact nature of this striking distinction. When talking about the stones, either natural or man-made, most people only seem to have one or two good examples in their environment. Most such stones are believed to embody a highly local past and such objects are therefore seldom considered in the wider topological context I have proposed here. From only one or two of such cases it is difficult to draw more general conclusions or to come to the clear-cut distinction I have presented here. The main problem for local communities, while theorizing about the stone objects in and around their settlements, is the clear absence of real knowledge of a historical continuity. Present-day highland communities in no

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way resemble the people or practices depicted on the megaliths of southern Sumatra. Where their own ancestors are credited with bringing about a new order and, even more so, with shaping an entire physical environment, it seems logical to associate many of the more eye-catching natural stones with them. Many features of the physical landscape are associated with this ancestral past. The man-made stones, however, confront the present-day highlanders with an anomaly, and they feel a certain awe, they are confronted with the unknown other. A similar sense of discontinuity existed among many agrarian societies in ancient Europe, where prehistoric burial mounds were believed to be the dwellings of the Little People and other uncanny beings (Lemaire, 1970:180). The man-made stones of southern Sumatra confront the highlander with highly refined and powerful objects that depict a hostile and warlike people. Yet their faces, clothing, jewellery, or the practices depicted are unfamiliar and do not resemble anything familiar today. Here the motif of the ancient other arises, and its otherness becomes highly exaggerated. Thus local lore speaks of people with their feet turned backwards, being yellow, or having monkey's tails. But it also speaks of a cruel and dangerous power that is now overtly associated with a preceding stage, in which people still lacked rules and norms. The stone objects thus come to stand for a slain enemy, an ancient other who is now expelled, but whose former presence is still felt, awkwardly, although it at the same time can be a potential source of power. The ancient other, once expelled can, seemingly, be made into an ally. In a sideline, Schnitger (1989:137) reports how 'the petrified bodies [of the stone sculptures] were later divided by the people. Every man took a piece and laid it in the field or in his village, to assure a rich harvest and many children'. This might to some extent explain the treatment many of the statues received. The ancient other, once slain, is taken apart, and like the pacified stone jaws, might be transformed into a benevolent power.

Considering the frequent mention of ancient others in popular stories and local lore, and especially as it is represented by these stone objects, one could conclude that over the centuries southern Sumatra must have been the arena of many shifts and changes. The stories in which the Rejang are expelled from such areas as the Besemah plain, Padang Guci, Semendo, or Serawai, however difficult to prove historically, are examples of the opposition autochthonous/migrant, and represent a variant on what Fox (1995) has described as the 'insider/outsider perspective'. Where everywhere in Sumatra people and communities strive to claim precedence (Reuter, 1992), the southern Sumatra material provides us with yet another intriguing example of how people try to claim the status of newcomers and thus outsiders, who obtained the right to the lands they now inhabit by force. Such a claim can only be asserted by depicting previous communities as being inhuman or half-people and thus wild and uncivilized. Nowadays these stories are told with a degree of unease since no one in Indonesia welcomes ethnic tension or cultural contradictions. The age of the magical ancestors is a bygone era, only remembered in the region's many megalithic remains.

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Notes

1. In this article I will generally refer to the geographical unit of southern Sumatra. Although this unit, which was once even destined to become a residency (the residency of Southern Sumatra), also includes the current province of Jambi, the data I present here were mainly collected in the highland areas of respectively the provinces of Bengkulu and South Sumatra proper, and to a lesser extent in the province of Lampung.
2. Generally the rivers mentioned are the Ogan, Kommering, Lematang, Kikim, Musi, Rawas, Bliti, Lakitan, and the Banyu Asin (cf. KITLV H 117; KITLV H 557 a). However, as said, variations occur both in space and time.
3. The only recent publications on them were additions to van der Hoop's study (Caldwell, 1997) and some findings of the National Archaeological Service (cf. Haris Sukendar, Nugroho, and others, n.d.), the latter only published in Indonesian. In 1974 Bronson and Wisseman (1974:94) called Sumatra 'one of the few remaining archaeological frontiers'.
4. Bronson and Wisseman (1974:90–91) express their surprise that much of the Sumatran relief sculpture and statuary 'tends on the whole to be strongly idiosyncratic and quite unlike that of Java [...]. Most reliefs and statues in Sumatra cannot easily be dated through stylistic comparisons from other areas. A second apparent fact is that this art is distributed very unevenly over space and time'. They think that the Pasemah statues can date from anywhere between the first and tenth century C.E.
5. The belief in such a power must once have been widespread in Indonesia. Similar stories are known, for example, from West Java, where according to Veth (cited in Ende 1892:99), legend has it that the 800 stone statues at *Arca Domas*, at the foot of Mount Pangrango, had been 800 unbelievers who because of their refusal to convert to Islam had been petrified by a curse.
6. Compare Schefold (1973: 102) who describes a similar notion in the Mentawai Islands, where talented and eloquent speakers are thought to have the supernatural quality of being *kerek* (literally 'prickly'). In a metaphorical sense an effective charm therefore always has spines.
7. In another instance, a so-called stone dog (*batu anjing*) near Batu Ruse village was buried upside down. Similarly, in Aceh, more strict Muslims are reputed to have systematically knocked off the heads of Fu-dogs that decorated porcelain jars (Wessing: personal communication. Wessing has one of these jars in his collection.)
8. This case is somehow complicated by the fact that the Batu Raja statues are in no sense man-made and therefore are not figurative. They bear only vague resemblances to human-like figures. One can therefore hardly speak of iconoclasm in a strict sense. However, since people attribute supernatural powers to these objects the destruction whether of man-made or naturally shaped objects can certainly be seen as iconoclasm. A better example comes from Uwe Teras, one of my older informants, who proudly told me how he had personally damaged the head of one of the statues. Such a deed, according the local people, was not without risk. Helfrich (KITLV 799) wrongly concludes that stones transformed by human hands are found everywhere in the highlands, except for Semende, suggesting that owing to an early Islamic influence this community had tried to hide them or demolish them as signs of superstition.
9. Similar examples are known in West Java. Brumund (1868:67) describes some heavily mutilated statues at the summit of the Pasir Sinala hill (Tjampea). In ancient Pajajaran times, the locals told him, a young prince was to marry a beautiful princess, but on the day of the marriage the girl ran off with another, leaving the prince enraged. He, however, decides to follow them, over the summit of Sinala, where he meets a

number of men sitting together. They must have seen his bride, but as they deny having seen her, he kills them and severely mutilates their bodies, after which he curses them and changes them into stone. Finally he meets the couple, who are killed. The adulterous couple, but also the prince are finally petrified. Again it is an immoral deed, adultery, which causes humans to turn into stone. Brumund (ibid. 75) affirms that the mutilation of stone sculptures is not without risk. 'Once somebody had cut off the heads of one of the sculptures, the next day he was, however, found to be completely insane.' In the southern Sumatran context one sometimes speaks of stones that ask for a soul-sacrifice (*batu minta njawe*) as meeting them would be very dangerous, and would minimally cause one to become mad.

10. The dichotomy nature-culture has lately been criticized within the social sciences (Descola and Palsson, 1996; Tuan, 1998) and also in two recent studies of archaeological remains in a south English coastal area (Tilley and others, 2000, Tilley and Bennett, 2001). The distinction is said to be a highly artificial one, which in the past has led archaeologists to ignore natural configurations. 'Nature tends to be ignored precisely because it is not culture and it is therefore considered to be relatively unimportant in interpretation' (Tilley and Bennett, 2001:335). In conclusion Tilley and others (2000:197) state that 'whilst acknowledging that the distinction between a stone that has been moved by human agency and one that has not, is important for interpretation, this does not make it more or less culturally significant.'

11. That this story might have another function is clear from similar formulations mentioned by Korn (1946:9) who, in describing the village territory speaks of 'the boundaries that were for ever marked by the solemn act of village foundation; commanding the earth spirits to leave and return to whence they had come, upstream and downstream, so far, that chimes and drums are no longer audible'. In Java the area over which the village guardian spirit has power is coterminous with the space above the village within which one can hear the sound of a voice—hear the village alarm drum (Wessing, 1999:132). The belief in stone instruments seems widespread. For a similar interpretation see the petrified gong chime (*talempong batu*) at Talang Anau, West Sumatra (Pätzold, 1995). Toorn (1890:86) also mentions the *batu nan mandarui* (singing stones) found among the Minangkabau, which produce sound and are said to accommodate holy men, while Schnitger (1989:117) describes how wives of prominent Nias chiefs formerly performed dances on so-called *niogaji* stones. He tells how 'in this connection it may be mentioned that most of the *niogaji* produce a musical sound when struck with the flat of the hand. It is quite possible that the dancer formerly produced this sound with her feet, or that she was accompanied by hands clapping on the stone'. In southern Sumatra there are also stories about so-called *batu ngoag*, talking stones, that according to local lore produce the sound of a buffalo. These days they are seldom heard, however.

12. That this might actually have been the case is shown by another account by Schnitger (1989:115) of Nias. He describes long rows of megaliths that formerly stood in front of the houses and tells of the belief that these villages have disappeared, leaving only these stone monuments in the desolate wilderness. Bakels (2000:63) describes similar stones (the *pulong negeri*) in Kerinci, where they are also said to mark former ritual centres.

13. Hidding (1933: 470) notes that stone objects in themselves are experienced as something special that, in contrast to so many natural things, are unchangeable and imperishable, and thus can have sacred meaning to people who are constantly confronted with change and transition.

14. Schnitger (1989: 128) mentions another possible occasion in describing similar

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stones in Negri Sembilan (Malaysia), where they are called *tanda negeri*. He complains that people can hardly describe their use and function but do say that these objects are monuments to their ancestors and partly memorials of the founding of a federation (*tanda negri*). They add, moreover, that the stones can also be seen as the boundary of places of assembly where folk games were formerly played. The stone mortars (*lesung batu*) that are regularly found in southern Sumatra are indeed often interpreted as gaming tables, probably referring to the game of *gail* or *main petis*, a traditional form of gambling and boasting that was played while singing above a flat stone.

15. The oath-taking stone of Pelang Kenidai village was last used in 1952. Another good example of an oath-taking stone is the so-called Six Stone Pillars (*Batu tiang enam*) at the village of Pajar Bulan (Besemah Ulu Manna), which according to van der Hoop (1932: 54) is a prehistoric stone avenue. Local people tell how in the past, if stolen cattle from the coastal region were imported into Besemah Ulu Manna, the animals could not pass by these stones, as the ancestors were angry about the theft.

16. An indigenous manuscript in the Voorhoeve collection (LUB Or. 8447–333) describes the various rules for sacrifice: when a buffalo should be sacrificed or when a human sacrifice is necessary to re-establish the cosmic balance (cf. Wessing and Jordaan, 1997). This, of course, is nothing more than a written formula and may have been a mere metaphorical usage. See also Kruyt (1906:209), Jordaan and Wessing (1996). Schnitger (1989:70), moreover, refers to similar practices at the North Sumatran Sangkilon temple of Padang Lawas, which are much older, however. Here a Yamari idol was worshipped, one of the most demoniac phenomena in Buddhism.

17. Others think of them as Rejang shrines *(candi Rejang)* and call them such, referring to their dominant neighbours in the west. I will return to this point later.

18. In his study on Besemah concepts, Collins (unpublished: 307) juxtaposes order (*jagat*) and jungle (*rimbe*). The *Jagat Besemah*, or Besemah world, 'is conceived to have resulted from an original merging of peoples in ancestral times and an establishment by the founding ancestors of a social and moral order. In the course of time and history, Jagat Besemah is also conceived to have given rise to various groups which are now dispersed throughout the region'. The introduction of new values was also marked by the abolition of former magical practices and witchcraft, which were henceforth forbidden by ancestral law.

19. See also the account of the former *pasirah* of the Aji Kommering Ulu shire, who claims to be descended from Majapahit (KITLV D H 117). He tells how the arch-founder Naga Barissan arrived from Majapahit and settled at the Pasagit hill. 'At that time Hadjie was already populated by people that lacked rules and institutions, just like animals'. The animal association made with these former inhabitants will be dealt with below.

20. See also Fox (1995:218).

21. The Minangkabau still refer to the magical phenomenon of seven estuaries (*tujuah muaro*) from which the sand should be collected and from which a magical love potion could be made. Similar associations exist in relation to the southern Sumatran kingdom of seven gorges (see below) and a place in Banten (West Java), which is known as the seven springs (*sumur tujuh*).

22. The others are located at Mount Dempo, in the middle of the ocean, and in the halo of the sun. Older beliefs in this part of Sumatra have it that the origin of every person lies in one of these four domains, which are connected by a crossroads, the *simpang padu empat*. In this context they are also mentioned by Helfrich (MS KITLV H 799), who calls them *kundu*, or dwelling places of the soul.

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23. Cf. van Wouden (1935), Scholz (unpublished), de Josselin de Jong (1980), Fox (1995), and Schefold (2001). Mus (1975:10) speaks of a lord of the soil, the earth/fertility (= nature) spirit.
24. Although Serunting is normally not depicted as Javanese, he is an outsider. This is shown by the name of his lineage, Semidang, which probably comes from the highland Malay *midang midang*, to wander or to travel. As was pointed out earlier, Serunting and his brothers are generally believed to have come from Lampung.
25. This shire in the Lematang area, near present-day Rambang Dangku, like the Rejang community of highland Lebong, has a social organization based on four clans known as *ampat petulai*. (That of highland Lebong was called the Rejang Four Brothers; Jaspan, 1976: 184.) The *ampat petulai* were generally thought to be of Rejang descent (van Royen, 1927: 40).
26. Jaspan (unpublished: 27), however, points out that the Rejang have a concept of a heartland and 'a larger area settled by Redjang emigrants and cognate peoples, mainly the Lembak and Ampat Lawang, to whom a Rejang origin was ascribed by the people of Lebong as such'. These outer territories, comparable to the Minangkabau notion of *rantau* (in contrast to their cultural epicentre, the *darek*) are generally known by the Rejang as the land of the scattered fragments, 'the end of the smoke trail' (*tanea kepetjua sumbing, mar udjung aseup*).
27. Such warlike events are mentioned especially in epic sagas (*guritan*). Jaspan (1976:112), for example, mentions the aphoristic reference to *silam Bengkule timbul Gumai* ('When Bengkulu went down, Gumai arose), which could imply that the Gumai might be refugees from Bengkulu as is indeed often suggested by neighbouring communities. Popular songs like *perang Aceh* (the Aceh War), and the widely distributed story of *Dayang Rindu* (Voorhoeve, 1978) also refer to the occurrence of historical warfare.
28. There are different explanations for the term *berekor* (tailed), the most likely being an etymological corruption of *biku*, the term the Rejang use for the four princely brothers from Majapahit who are said to be the founders of the four original Rejang clans (Jaspan, 1976: 184). *Biku* also means Buddhist monk, and the term might thus refer to the Buddhism formerly adhered to by these people. According to Jaspan (unpublished: 4) they were the last to be converted to Islam.
29. Another such example of the stigmatization of forest dwellers is foregrounded in the so-called *jeme guguh* stories. The *seguguh* is said to be a human-like animal, that bears close resemblance to the *orang pandak* in other areas. These forest-dwelling humans are said to be hairy and small, while their feet are turned backwards. People tell how these forest humans can be 'cultivated' and examples are mentioned of such cultivated *guguh* marrying into Besemah lineages. People would still point at certain houses and say he or she is a descendant of a *seguguh*. After further inquiries I often found that not coincidentally, *Kubu* or *Suku Pindah* people, hunter-gatherers, had in the past married into these houses. Westenenk (1932:48–49) significantly remarks that the *Kubu* are very afraid to be associated with these forest creatures. He also tells how a similar race of forest people, called *sedapak* is said to live in the bottom-lands of the east coast around Palembang, feeding on sea food.
30. Some Semende mention a similar name, Raje Labang, as a past ruler, which obviously derives from Rejang Lebong, the present-day heartland of these people, while in Tanjung Sakti the Rejang ruler Kunjit is regularly described as only wearing a half sword.
31. That this situation might even be further complicated is shown by the fact that there

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is a Semidang clan among both the Besemah and Rejang (van Royen, 1927:4), while as we saw above some Besemah are believed to be of Rejang descent. Present-day ethnic affiliations thus sometimes seem to be of a fairly recent date.

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